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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted among adults enrolled in adult basic education (ABE) General Educational Development (GED) courses to determine their perceptions of the impact of the ABE/GED programs on their employment/economic position, skill and knowledge acquisition, community involvement, attitudinal changes, personal relationships, and continuing education. After a review of the literature, a questionnaire was constructed and orally administered to 120 randomly selected ABE/GED students in three Maryland counties. The interviews were supplemented with group discussions, classroom observations, and case studies. Results of the research suggest that the major changes ascribed to participation were in the affective domain. Participants reported improved self-concepts and increased feelings of personal worth. They also reported significant improvement in skill areas such as reading, writing, computation, and consumer behavior. The most improved skill was mathematical ability. Involvement in community organizations also increased slightly, growing in relation to time in the program. Although no positive economic impact could be documented, many participants reported that they anticipated getting jobs, promotions, and so forth as a result of their involvement in the program. Many of the participants planned to continue in the program to earn their GED. (The authors note the study is limited by its interviews of current participants rather than of students who have completed the program, and its ability to measure only perceptions of impact, rather than actual impact, of ABE/GED on the participants.) (KC)

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PERCEPTIONS OF PROGRAM IMPACT: ABE/GED IN MARYLAND

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PERCEPTIONS OF PROGRAM IMPACT: ABE/GED IN MARYLAND[1]

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Introduction

Conventional wisdom suggests that participation in Adult Basic Education programs frequently leads to employment, occupational mobility, improved self-concepts, better family relationships and greater integration into one's community. These aspirations are clearly reflected in Maryland's State Adult Education Plan:

> Programs of instruction in adult basic education shall be planned and administered...for the purpose of eliminating the inability of adults to read and write English and to raise substantially the educational level of such adults to make them less likely to become dependent on others. To this end, the programs will be designed to improve the capability of such adults to benefit from occupational training and, otherwise, to increase their opportunities for more productive and profitable employment and make them better able to meet their adult responsibilities (1978: 27).

What is less clear, however, is the extent to which these goals are ultimately realized. The demand for accountability generated by economic pressures and intensified by Taxpayer revolts such as Proposition 13 and TRIM amendments is forcing adult educators to examine the impact of their programs. Legislators are demanding to know what they are getting in return for their

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appropriations. Educational administrators are interested in identifying the most cost-effective program strategies available to them. Teachers are committed to improving instruction so, on the assumption that results are the best indicators of success, need to know whether anything changed because of their efforts. The importance of impact research is unchallenged.

This paper summarizes the findings of a research project designed to assess the perceptions of ABE/GED program impact in Maryland. Precisely what constitutes impact--more importantly, significant impact--differs greatly in the minds of ABE/GED participants, teachers, administrators, theorists and researchers.

Impact Research

Research on literacy programs goes back at least to the thirties and such programs as the South Carolina Opportunity Scools, the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Advisory Committee on National Literacy. Much of this early work focused on developing appropriate teaching methodologies, the removal of obstacles to student progress, the relationship between crime and illiteracy and the effectiveness of instructional materials (Cook, 1977). There appears to have been little emphasis on program evaluation or on impact other than student progress toward some learning objectives.

Recent studies of ABE have taken three forms: 1) descriptive studies; 2) process studies; and, 3) impact studies. Descriptive studies report the facts regarding ABE programs to the extent that they are known. While not particularly analytical, they describe the learners, where they come from, the kinds of classes held and what resources are allocated to the program. This is an important part of justification, but of marginal utility in improving programs or assessing results. Hunter and Harmon provide the best overview of

ABE programs to date in their recently published book, Adult Illiteracy in the United States (1979). They do not, however, examine the process of basic education or the impact of ABE programs.

Analyses of the process of basic education programs have generally been administrative in nature and are not widely reported in the literature. Supervisors monitor programs and write reports suggesting ways through which they believe instruction could be improved or local programs made more effective. Experienced professionals frequently serve as part of teams to audit programs in other counties, using the "accreditation" model of evaluation. Mezirow, et al., made the program process the central focus of a major study as a first step toward generalization, but this is an exception (1975).

Research on ABE reported in the literature in recent years has given more attention to outcomes or impacts. The Appalachian Adult Basic Education Demonstration Center at Morehead State University in Kentucky has conducted numerous studies over the years, though their findings are not widely available. Several studies, however, can be cited as significantly shaping the nature of other impact evaluations.

Gran, for example, conducted a series of follow-up studies in Jackson County, Iowa, between 1967-1970 measuring the educational, social and financial benefits of graduates of Adult Evening High Schools. The findings showed that ABE positively affected job mobility, employment opportunities for housewives, income, participation in continuing education and social mobility (Gran, 1974). This study was particularly helpful to other investigators for several reasons: 1) it suggested a useful format for questions; 2) it examined both academic and personal gains from ABE participation; and, 3) it emphasized the importance of social changes resulting from ABE in addition to those financial gains normally assumed to be the product of participation.

A study by Kent using a national sample of 2300 participants used pre- and post-tests as well as personal interviews to assess the impact of ABE programs. He found that participation resulted in gains in reading and math achievement, improved job retention and increased income (Parker, 1976). His instrument and procedures were valuable in developing subsequent ABE impact studies.

A 1976 study by Becker, et al., in Wisconsin examined the effectiveness of ABE in generating cognitive and affective changes in participants. Personal interviews with 270 adults who attended the Gateway Institute's ABE program between 1973-75 drew the following conclusions: 1) ABE is effective in helping learners achieve their math and reading goals; 2) ABE led to an improvement in skills such as speaking English and writing; 3) some participants subsequently obtained their GED or continued their education in other ways; 4) most respondents experienced changes in employment following the program; 5) some reported an increase in their self-confidence and ability to communicate; and, 6) others felt that their relationships with their children and families improved because of participation in ABE (Becker, et al., 1976). Apart from the implications of these findings for practice, the study was important because it described a useful model for ABE follow-up studies in other programs.

A 1977 dissertation by Law at Florida State University is also a significant contribution to the literature of impact studies in that it examined 34 program evaluations in an attempt to develop some generalizations about ABE programs. He found that ABE improves basic skills such as reading, writing and speaking, promotes continuing education and results in attitudes that are necessary for job retention. Law concluded, however, that participation in ABE fails to reduce dependency, increase self-reliance or improve the quality of family life. His review of other studies is particularly significant since

he was able to show that impact studies tend to focus on those variables that are easiest to measure while avoiding others that adult educators frequently assume to result from participation. He noted that studies generally fail to come to grips with more abstract concepts such as dependence, self-reliance, acceptance of adult responsibility and the educational experiences of children. While much more difficult to measure, Law argues that more attention to these variables may provide greater justification for ABE programs than merely examining income and educational achievement resulting from participation (1977).

To synthesize, while the literature reports a variety of research methodologies, the findings suggest that impacts of ABE/GED programs generally fall into several major categories: economic impacts, skill and knowledge acquisition, community involvement, attitudinal changes, personal relationships, and continuing education. This study of the impact of ABE/GED programs in Maryland examined changes in each of these areas.

Methodology

This study was based on personal interviews with 120 participants in ABE/GED programs in three Maryland counties (Prince George's, Howard and Baltimore), and supplemented with group discussions, classroom observation and case studies. The instrument was developed through the analysis of earlier research reports and discussions with ABE/GED students, teachers, administrators and specialists. The pretest resulted in a number of changes in the instrument. Some questions were added, several clarified and others dropped.

The sampling frame was developed by randomly selecting 26 ABE/GED classes from which five participants were chosen to interview. The number of classes within the sampling framework from each county was stratefied by

the number offered in their ABE/GED programs. An attempt was made to randomly select the five respondents within each class but there was an element of self-selection since a few persons refused to participate while others insisted on being involved. The interviews were carried out near the end of the academic year so some classes were so small that another had to be selected from the same center to reach the required five interviews.

The interviews, carried out on a one-to-one basis by graduate students in adult education, took place in lounges, libraries and empty classrooms at the ABE/GED centers. They usually lasted around twenty minutes though the range went from thirteen minutes to more than an hour.

The survey findings were coded, punched on cards and analyzed using cross tabulations and chi squares to assess whether apparent differences were significant. The interviewers also kept personal diaries and provided written summaries of their observations of the research process itself. At the questionnaire design stage early in the study, discussions were held with participants in several ABE/GED classes that generated useful information for the analysis. Near the end of the study, several recent GED graduates were interviewed in some depth to elicit additional qualitative data regarding their perceptions of program impact.

Although the concurrent use of several research techniques involving both quantitative and qualitative measured increased the validity and reliability of the data, the study has some serious limitations as well. First, the study is based on perceptions of impact rather than actual impacts. Second, the sampling frame was based on students enrolled in ABE/GED programs at the time of the survey so people whose personal goals had been reached earlier and therefore had dropped out before the study were not included in the analysis. Neither were those who left because the program was not meeting their needs.

Finally, the diachronic perspective of this study elimiated possible "sleeper effects" from consideration in the analysis.

The sample appeared to reflect the population of ABE/GED students in the three counties in the study, as can be seen in the following brief description.

Description of the Sample

One hundred and twenty interviews were conducted in three Maryland counties: Howard, Baltimore and Prince George's. Of these, 116 were used in the analysis. Approximately half were white, 42% black, and the rest primarily of Hispanic and Asiatic origin. The ages ranged from 17 to over 70, with the largest proportion (34%) falling between 21 and 30 years old. Only 7% were over 50.

Most of the participants in the survey (69%) reported having children. The number of children ranged from one to eight, with a mean of 2.2 per family with ages ranging from one year to over thirty.

The formal education backgrounds of the respondents ranged from "none" to completed college educations. Both extremes of this scale generally consisted of "foreign born" participants. The mean number of years of school completed by the respondents was nine years. Fifty-one percent said they had stopped their formal schooling between the 10th and 12th grades, while 29% dropped out during Junior High School (7th to 9th grade). None of those under 21 had less than a 7th grade education while none over 50 had more than a 9th grade education.

Almost half (45%) of the participants had been enrolled in ABE/GED classes for three months or less; only 20% for more than one year. The mean participation time for the respondents was approximately six months and the median, four months.

Reasons for Participation

A description of the background characteristics of the sample in this study would be incomplete without also considering the reasons why they participated in ABE/GED programs. Mezirow et al. (1975) found that people enroll in ABE/GED classes for a variety of reasons that they grouped into two major categories: those that are related to employment and those that are related to family, community and personal growth. While this study found that the motives for participating in ABE/GED programs, reported by respondents, were frequently mixed and sometimes difficult to articulate, they are similar to those in the Mezirow study. The data suggest that the young participate in ABE/GED classes for work-related reasons. The most common response of those participants under thirty was, "to get my GED". The reasons for needing the GED were related to finding employment, to get better jobs, and keep present jobs, or to continue one's education. Interestingly, 28% of those participants between the age of 31 and 40 years of age reported that the main reason they were attending ABE/GED classes was to get a diploma in order to continue their formal educations. Adults over 40 were more likely than those under 40 to suggest that their reasons for attending ABE/GED classes were related to self-improvement.

The sex of the participant was also related to the motivation for participating in ABE/GED programs. Females were more likely than males to respond that they wished to help their children or that they were attending for the sheer "joy of learning". As one woman in her early thirties reported, "I came to help my child and myself". Also, of those that responded that they were taking part in the program so that they could go on into some form of higher education, 87.6% were female. A greater percentage of males (36%) than females (26.6%) repsonded that their reason for participation was "to get

their GED". Males were also more likely than females to be motivated by friends, relatives or employers.

The sample had a degree of face validity in that it reflected the background characteristics of the ABE/GED population in the counties in which the study was done. The respondents were similar in age, sex and ethnic background to learners in the program. This information, together with a summary of the reasons why people participate in ABE/GED programs, provides the framework within which the findings will be presented and discussed in the next section.

Perceptions of Impact: The Findings

The instrument included a number of questions designed to elicit the respondents' perceptions of changes in their lives that they ascribed to participation in ABE/GED. Based on the literature review, these changes were grouped into several categories: changes in economic status, attitudinal changes, changes in personal relationships, and participation in continuing education.

Economic Impacts

It is clear from the literature that the single most significant indicator of program impact is change in the employment patterns of ABE/GED participants. The aspect of employment most frequently studied is the obtainment of employment. A second employment variable reported in the literature is the extent to which ABE/GED participation leads to better jobs, promotions or salary increases. Other studies have examined the impact of ABE/GED participation on a third employment variable--the participants' increased ability to hold their present jobs. In general, the research has been inconclusive

about the relationship of participation to all three of these employment variables.

Finding Employment. Although finding employment is the single most studied impact variable, it is based on the assumption that ABE/GED participants are/were unemployed in the first place. The population surveyed in this study of the perceived impacts of ABE/GED participation was, in general, not "hard core" unemployed. Fifty-nine percent of the participants were employed at the time of the interview and another twenty-one percent were homemakers with at least one child under eighteen years of age. This left only twenty percent unemployed of which two percent were retired. Therefore, ABE/GED participation could not significantly change the employment status of the sample surveyed. Among the eighteen percent unemployed and 20% homemakers, 84% wished to get jobs in the future and of these participants, 85% perceived their chances of getting jobs in the future as "better" due to participation in the ABE/GED program. Younger participants (100%) were more apt to perceive education as important in helping them to get and keep a job.

Of the 59% who reported themselves as employed, the largest porportion of jobs were classified as unskilled (19%) and/or semi-skilled (19%). Sixteen percent of the employed participants held sales positions such as cashiers and 13% were involved in the care of the young or aged. Only 17% held jobs that were classified as skilled and 9% held clerical positions.

Promotions and Better Jobs. A second employment variable studied within the context of ABE/GED participation is job mobility--better jobs, promotions and/or salary increases. With 45% of the sample population having been enrolled in ABE/GED classes for less than three months, it would be unrealistic to expect significant changes in variables related to promotions and salary increases.

On the other hand, sixty-six percent of the participants perceived their chances of getting a raise as improved as a result of their participation in ABE/GED classes. Blacks (75%) were more apt to anticipate ABE/GED participation as a factor that will help them get a raise than whites (56%).

Job Retention. A third employment variable related to ABE/GED participation is the extent to which the program aided people in keeping their present jobs. In this survey, of those employed, 85% were holding the same job they had when they started taking ABE/GED classes. Although the majority of the participants were employed in the same job, it is not possible to attribute this to ABE/GED participation.

An indirect method of looking at how ABE/GED participation may aid the individual in keeping their present job is to examine how the participants in this survey perceived themselves in relation to improved job skills. Of the participants in this survey who were employed, 63% perceived themselves as being able to do their jobs better since enrolling in ABE/GED class. Improved math skills were indicated by 37% of the participants as being the skill most often used to do their job better, with reading (24%) and English (21%) also being mentioned. Based upon these perceptions, there is evidence that participants are, in fact, applying what they had learned in their ABE/GED classes to their jobs. This, they believed, resulted in improved job performance.

In conclusion, although the data from this survey indicate that ABE/GED participation has had little actual impact on the employment status of the sample surveyed, perceptions of impact on the opportunity for employment and the ability to perform on the job, and the chance of promotion have been greatly affected as a result of ABE/GED participation.

Skill and Knowledge Acquisition

Federally funded adult basic education is a product of Title III of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 whose focus is the:

> ...education for adults whose ability to speak, read, or write the English language constitutes a substantial impairment of their ability to get or retain employment commensurate with their real ability.

The U.S. Office of Education interprets the broad mandate of the Act to include "instruction in communicative, computational, and social skills".

Using the acquisition of basic skills as an indicator of program impact, this survey examined the participants' perceptions of the impact of ABE programs on their ability to read and write the English language, and use basic computational skills.

Reading. The ability (or inability) to read has been the major criterion for determining an individual's need for adult basic education. In examining the perceived impact of the ABE program on the reading level of the participants, 76% of the respondents perceived themselves as reading "better" than when they first entered the program. Although sex or age of the respondent were not related, ethnicity was significantly related to perception of improved reading siills, with blacks perceiving themselves as having improved in reading skills more than whites or others. The data also indicate that the longer the respondent had been enrolled in the program, the more they perceived themselves as reading better.

Writing Skills. A second indicator of the acquisition of basic skills is the respondent's perceptions of improved writing skills. When questions as to whether they could write better since entering the ABE program, 81% of the respondents perceived an improvement. Age was significantly related at the .05 level, with those over 30 being more likely to perceive an improvement than

those under 30 years of age. Another factor related to improvement of writing skills in this survey was ethnicity. Once again, as with reading, blacks were more likely than others to perceive an improvement in writing skills.

Computational Skills. The third basic skill examined as an indicator of program impact in this survey, mathematics, was perceived (most often) as having improved. Ninety percent of the respondents perceived themselves as being able to accomplish mathematical skills "better" than when they entered the ABE program. The improvement in computational skills was unrelated to the age, sex, or ethnicity of the participant.

The application of basic skills learned in the ABE classroom is believed to affect the shopping habits of participants. Consumerism was a fourth variable examined in relation to the acquisition of basic skills in this survey of perceived program impact.

Consumerism. When examining consumerism as a separate variable, the data indicate that 63% of the respondents perceived themselves as "better shoppers" as a result of participating in the ABE program. A greater percentage of females (67%) perceived themselves as better shoppers than males (55%). Age and ethnicity were not related to perception of increased shopping ability, but the length of time that one had participated in the program was significant at the .05 level.

Most Useful Things Learned. When asked what had been the "most useful" thing they had learned, "math" was the most common response (52%) for all groups. Males indicated reading as the second most common choice for the "most useful" subject (23.5%), and writing was third (11.8%). Females indicated speaking skills as the second choice for "most useful" subject (28%), and reading as the third choice (16.9%).

In conclusion, in analyzing the acquisition of basic skills as an impact of ABE program participation, one must examine the data in relation to the individual goals of the participant. The data from this survey indicate that the sex, age and race of the participant may be related to these goals. While this survey does not investigate actual impacts, the findings indicate that the participants perceive improved reading, writing, computational and consumer skills as a result of participation in ABE/GED.

Community Involvement

The literature indicates that those with limited education are often the same persons who suffer from other major social disadvantages including alienation. Therefore, as indicated by Boggs (1977), one of the major goals of ABE/GED programs is to encourage the assimilation of individuals into the mainstream of American society through the social improvement of that individual.

To assess the impact of ABE/GED participation on the social improvement of the individual, this survey investigated the relationship of participation in an ABE/GED program to the community involvement of the respondents. The participants' membership in community groups and their level of participation in those groups, their utilization of the public library system, their expressed interest in politics, and their awareness of social services were used as indicators of community involvement.

Involvement in Community Organizations. About half of the respondents to this survey reported belonging to at least one community organization. Age was significantly related to membership in a community organization, with older respondents reporting membership more often than younger respondents.

When examining the effect of ABE programs on one's level of participation in community organization, 70% of the respondents reported no change. However,

those who reported participating "more" in their community groups tended to have been enrolled in ABE/GED programs for over a year.

As the respondents answered questions and discussed their personal lives, an obvious impact of the ABE/GED program was the demand it placed on their free time. It was, therefore, concluded that using participants who are presently active in the program to assess the effect of this variable could be misleading. Longitudinal and follow-up research would produce a more accurate assessment of increased community involvement.

Use of the Library. A major source of information for most citizens in this country is the public library system. However, less educated adults are less likely to utilize this service. Therefore, one role of the ABE program is to provide a link between the ABE learner and the public library.

When examining the effect of ABE/GED participation on the use of the public library, this survey found that fifty percent of the respondents reported that they had recently used the library. Evidence from the data suggests that the use of the library is related to the age, ethnicity, and sex of the participant. Of those under 21 years of age, a large percentage (64.7%) reported that they had not recently used the library. Whites (57.7%) and others (54.5%) reported using the library more often than blacks (40.0%). The responses of males indicate that they use the library significantly less than females.

Political Interest. The assimilation of the individual into the mainstream of a democratic society requires involvement in the political structure of that society. This may be manifested through an increase in one's participation in the electoral process and parapolitical organizations. This study surveyed the political interest level of ABE/GED participants. The results indicate that 53% of the respondents expressed some interest in politics. Thirty-five percent perceived themselves as "more" interested in politics

since enrolling in the ABE program. Ethnicity and participation time were significantly related to an increase in political interest with blacks reporting an increase in political interest more frequently than whites or others. Also, the longer one had participated in the program, the more likely one was to perceive oneself as being "more" interested in politics.

This evidence indicates that class discussions of current events and an understanding of the political structure of the government can bring about a greater awareness of and interest in the political happenings in this country. As one young homemaker stated, "I really watch what is going on more now that I have an idea about how the government works".

Awareness of Social Services. Society believes that social services are readily available to all citizens in the country. Yet all too often, the physical and emotional health needs, and daycare needs, go unmet for adults with little formal education. The ABE/GED program can provide a link between this person and the social services available in the community. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents in this survey reported an increased awareness of the available social services as a result of participation in the ABE/GED program. This awareness was not significantly related to the age, sex, or ethnicity of the respondent. However, the longer one had participated in the ABE/GED program, the more likely one was to report an increased awareness of social services.

To synthesize, this survey provides limited evidence of perceived impact of ABE/GED programs on the social improvement of the individual through an increased involvement in community organizations, political interest, use of the library, and an awareness of social servicse. This may, however, more accurately reflect the short participation time of the respondents rather than the limitations of the program.

Attitudinal Changes

Definitions of functional literacy include not only those skills required for effective functioning in the community, but those that will be used toward the good of the individual. If ABE participation is to help one better meet one's adult responsibilities, an increase in self-confidence is an important outcome of program participation. The literature suggests that participation in an ABE/GED program affects the self concept of the individual.

Data from this survey of perceived impact also support this conclusion. Eighty-nine percent of the respondents reported "feeling different about themselves" as a result of their participation in the ABE/GED program. Females (92%) reported "feeling different" more frequently than males (83%). Whites (92%) and others (100%) also reported "feeling different" more frequently than blacks (80%).

As age increased, so did the tendency to report increased self-confidence. This increase in self-confidence is evident from the data regarding how the respondents felt about conferences with teachers. Of those respondents with school-aged children, 52.3% reported feeling more confident about discussing things with their children's teachers as a result of having participated in an ABE/GED program. Ethnicity was significantly related to increased confidence in teacher conferences.

Individual responses provide further evidence of the impact of the ABE program on the self concept of the individual. A woman explained that the program had helped to "give me the confidence to finish things that I start". Several expressed a "satisfaction with self" and others were "sorry they had waited so long". Some felt "more confidence in talking with people" and one woman said, "it's a real morale booster". Although it is difficult to measure this increase, self-confidence is believed not only to affect the individual,

one's family, and the community, but also to have far-reaching effects on the next generations.

Personal Relationships

Attitudinal changes are often reflected in how one relates not only to the community, but to co-workers, friends, and family members. Evidence from ABE impact studies suggests that the benefits of participation in an ABE program filter down from the participants to their children.

In this survey, eighty-six percent of the participants with children in school reported that their children requested help with homework. Of these participants, 61% reported feeling more confidence about their ability to help as a result of participation in the ABE program. Ethnicity was significantly related to the participants' perception of this increased ability to help with homework, with black parents perceiving an increase more frequently than whites or others.

A second aspect of the impact of ABE participation on school involvement is attendance at P.T.A. meetings. The data from this survey support Boggs' findings (1977) regarding no significant effect on P.T.A. attendance. In examining parental feelings of self-confidence during teacher conferences, 52.3% reported feeling more confidence. Ethnicity was significantly related to this variable with blacks reporting increased confidence more than whites or others.

The data from this survey support the findings of past impact research. The respondents reported that they studied with their children and helped them with their homework. They felt more confident about their ability to help their children with their homework, and more confident about discussing things with their children's teachers. However, P.T.A. attendance was not significantly affected by ABE participation.

Evidence from this survey and past research indicates that an improvement in the personal relationships of the program participants is an important effect of ABE participation.

Continuing Education

Whether the motivation for participating in an ABE/GED program is economic or personal, the attainment of educational credentials is often related to the individual goals of the participant. Because this study of perceived impact surveyed participants who are actively involved in the ABE program, it examined the intent of the respondent to continue the program until they had acquired a GED certificate. Ninety-one percent of the respondents reported that they intended to continue taking classes until they had reached this goal.

Summary and Conclusions

The results suggest that the major changes ascribed to participation were in the affective domain. Participants reported improved self-concepts and increased feelings of personal worth. They also reported significant improvements in skill areas such as reading, writing, computation and consumer behavior. The most salient skill identified by the respondents was improved computational ability.

Involvement in community organizations, political interest and the use of the public library were related to the length of time participants had been enrolled in the program. Although this study produced fewer changes in this area than anticipated, the findings also reflect the limitations of the design. Many participants reported being too busy with classes to have time for community activities or to become involved in local organizations. A survey carried out following completion of a class would be a more accurate evaluation

of whether or not participation in ABE/GED programs increases one's involvement within community organizations.

While no significant, direct economic changes could be documented, this is undoubtedly a function of the research design. The respondents were interviewed during the time in which they were enrolled in ABE/GED courses and consequently, newly acquired skills may not have yet been translated into employment, job mobility, or improved economic status. Many did, however, report that they anticipated brighter economic prospects (jobs, promotions, etc.) as a result of their involvement in the program.

Although participants were generally very satisfied with the program, many indicated that their classes should meet more frequently and for longer periods of time. The strong correlation between time spent in the program and perceived impacts suggests that educational planners should examine ways of allocating additional resources for ABE/GED. The fact that many enrollees with children in school reported studying together with them suggests that adult education should be viewed within the context of a lifelong learning environment. Adult educators need to find creative ways of linking their programs to the K-12 formal education system, since the performance of adults is perceived as improving the performance of their children.

The diachronic perspective provided by this survey of participants in the program is a limitation of the findings. Longitudinal studies, on the other hand, could potentially provide an evaluation of actual impacts over time. Building evaluation into the teaching program would enable administrators to monitor performance and measure impacts. This assumes a commitment to continuous evaluation using appropriate procedures (pre- and post-test designs, etc.), which, in turn, requires training in evaluation processes.

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